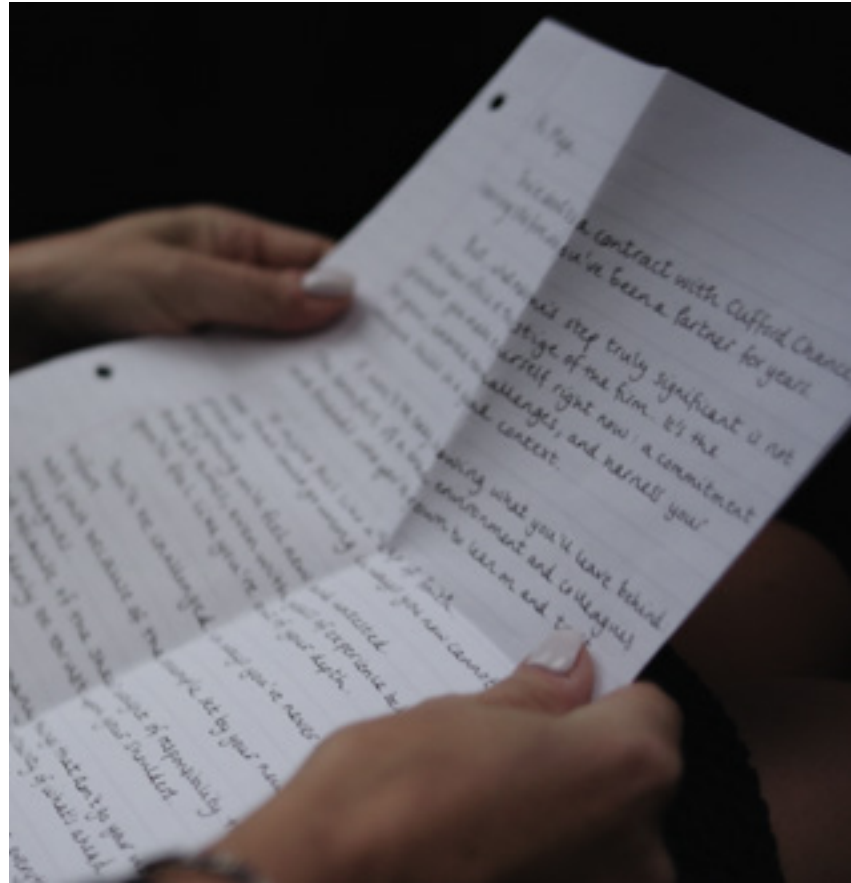


C L I F F O R D
C H A N C E

The Real Contract



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Introduction



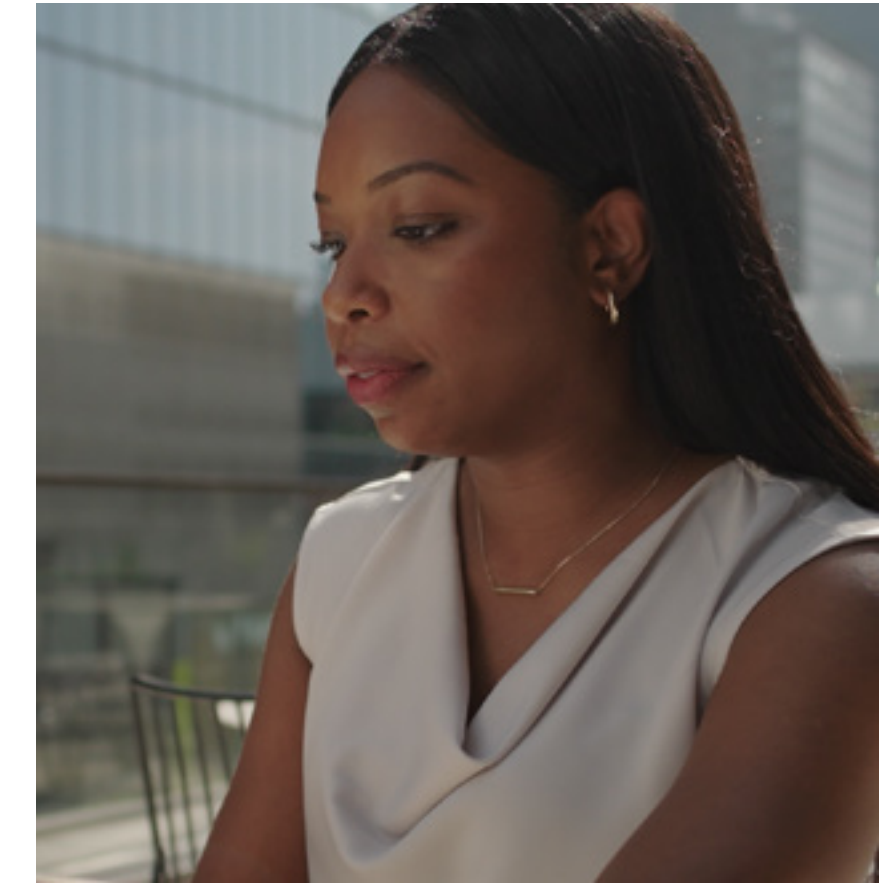
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“The real contract isn’t signed on paper. It’s the commitment you make to yourself.”

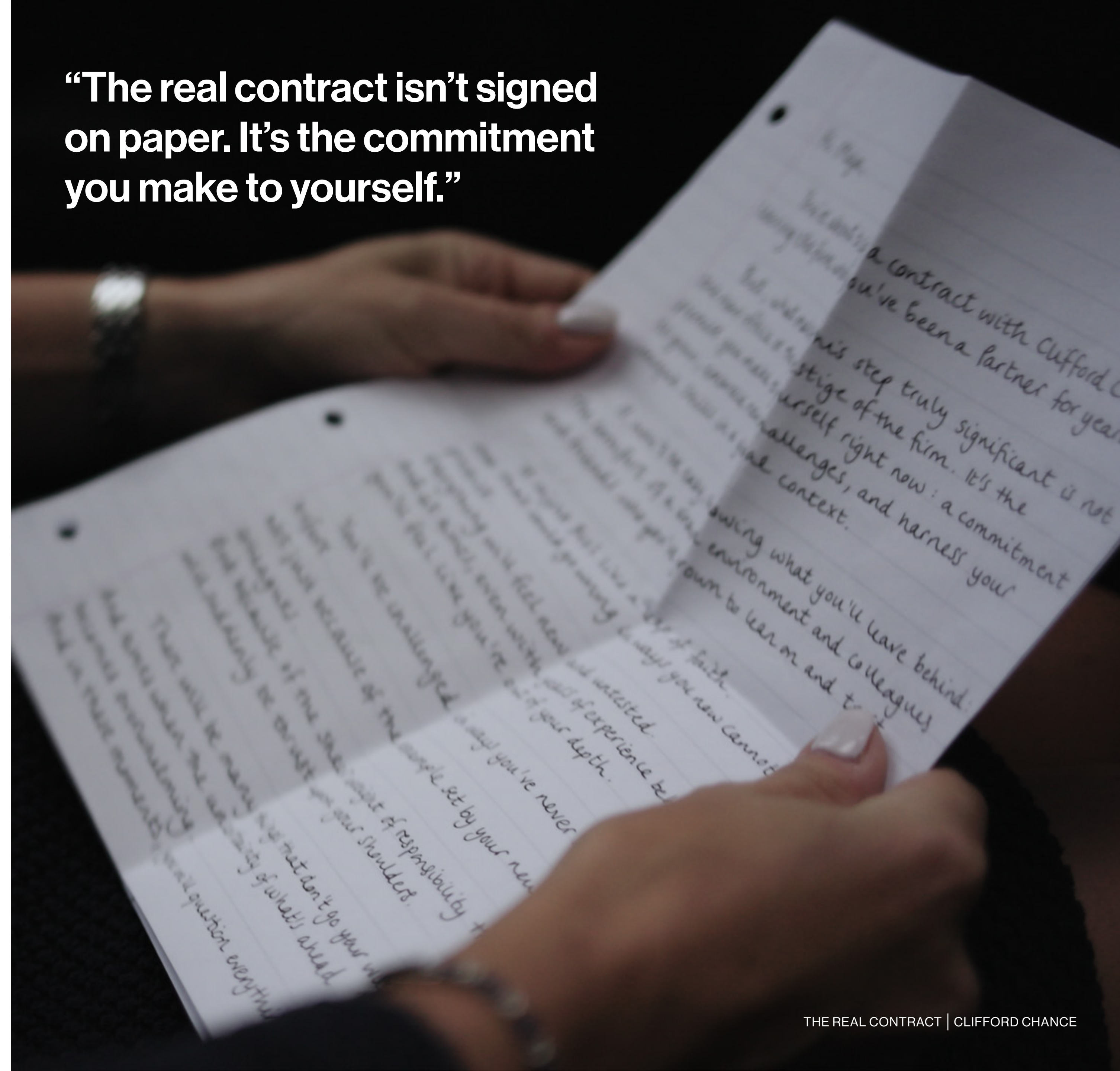
The Real Contract celebrates what it’s truly like to work at Clifford Chance. Discover six authentic stories from lawyers as they write a letter to their past selves reflecting on what The Real Contract means to them.

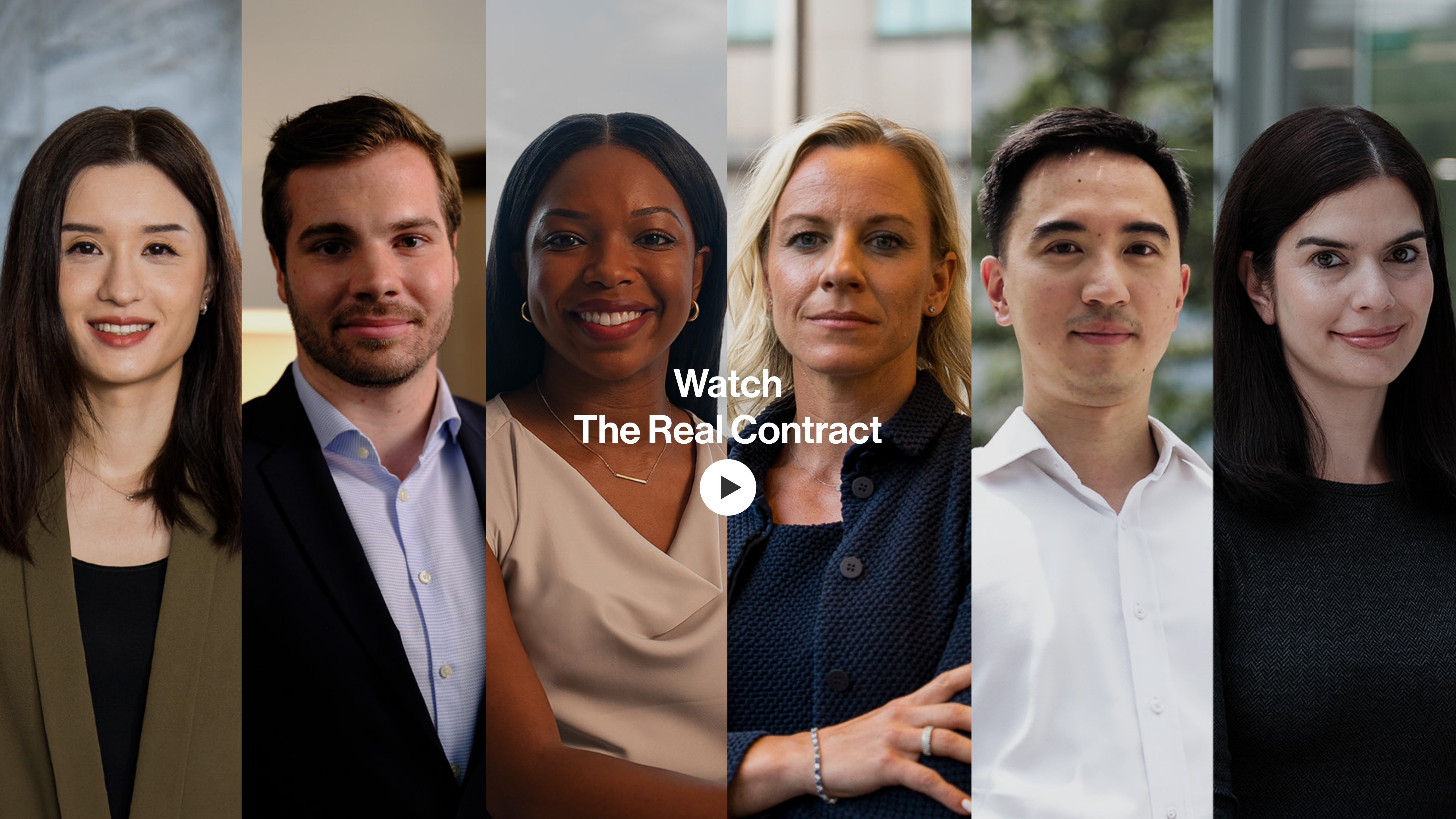
The Real Contract began as a way to help prepare aspiring lawyers for both the rigours and the rewards of a Training Contract at Clifford Chance. Launched in 2022, it was a campaign that spoke openly about the frank, unfiltered reality of practising law at the highest level.

The response was unprecedented. Eight awards, over a million views and hundreds of comments from across our global firm later, we realised that this message doesn’t just apply to those starting their Training Contract in London; it applies to people at all stages of their careers at Clifford Chance. In fact, a lawyer’s career is full of turning points and milestones, each requiring a fresh commitment with themselves to reach new heights and take on unfamiliar challenges.

That’s why we have relaunched The Real Contract with a widened scope to shine a light on our people in various parts of the world at different stages of their careers. We illuminate just how geographically vast life at Clifford Chance truly is - even beyond the many opportunities for travel and relocation, the diversity of our people means that everyone can benefit from different perspectives, and our multi-jurisdictional work makes headlines and impacts lives around the world.

This booklet will provide an authentic insight into what it’s really like at Clifford Chance, whether you’re a Trainee, an Associate, a Partner, or someone hoping to build their career at a global law firm.





Watch
The Real Contract



Charlotte Shieh

Senior Associate, Hong Kong

Charlotte is a Senior Associate in Hong Kong, specialising in commercial litigation, regulatory enforcement and investigations. She has experience working with clients from various sectors, including listed companies, financial institutions and insurance companies.

Dear Charlotte,

Welcome to the first day of the rest of your career.

Today, you will be promoted to Senior Associate.

It is a pivotal moment - a testament to your grit, tenacity and the potential others see in you.

But the road ahead will test you.

You'll be stretched and challenged in ways you've never been before.

The complexities of the cases you manage will demand more than just legal acumen; they'll require resilience, strategic thinking and commitment.

You will find yourself navigating

Dear Charlotte,

Welcome to the first day of the rest of your career.

Today, you will be promoted to Senior Associate.

It is a pivotal moment – a testament to your grit, tenacity, and the potential others see in you.

But the road ahead will test you.

You'll be stretched and challenged in ways you've never been before.

The complexities of the cases you manage will demand more than just legal acumen; they'll require resilience, strategic thinking, and commitment.

You will find yourself navigating uncharted waters, often feeling the weight of responsibility on your shoulders.

And there will be moments when any balance between your personal and professional lives seems difficult to achieve.

Others will remind you to be confident, to believe in yourself.

Yet you will end up questioning everything.

Whether you're too introverted.

But keep going.

Because you are good enough.

Your journey thus far has been a masterclass in learning and adaptation, and your only competition is yourself.

Find that anchor that grounds you.

Lean on your support system.

Over time, you will come to embrace your quiet fortitude as a strength, not a weakness.

You will realise you're stronger than you think – and the very challenges that seem insurmountable become the milestones you look back on.

So, when the going gets tough, just keep putting one foot in front of the other, as you always do.

Because with every moment you push through against all odds is a catalyst for growth – you're becoming a better version of yourself.

In time, you will feel energised by the work you do as you grapple with the intricacies and nuances of litigation.

Clients will appreciate you going the extra mile.

You will strive to lead with empathy and confident humility.

You will go on to work with colleagues from around the firm and across the globe on precedent-setting cases.

And you will continue to be inspired by their drive and ambition every day.

Remember to be kind to yourself – quiet your inner critic. It's not meant to be easy, so don't give up.

After all, it's a marathon, not a sprint – remember your training, embrace it, and most of all, enjoy it.

Yours, Charlotte.

Charlotte's Story



Tell us about becoming a lawyer at Clifford Chance. What drove you to choose this firm?

I didn't always plan to be in law. I read history as an undergraduate - I was drawn to the humanities, and thought of myself as a creative person. But after my degree, I felt that curiosity still pulling at me. In the end, I studied law not for the vocation, but to pursue my own interest.

“Clifford Chance stood out to me because of its global presence.”

I remember Clifford Chance standing out to me because of its global presence. I was born in London but raised in Hong Kong, so it was important to me that I found a firm that allowed me to maintain my connection and affinity to both. I got to spend six months of my two-year Training Contract at the London office before settling into my role here in Hong Kong, so it really felt like a full circle moment.

Why did you address your letter to the day you were promoted to Senior Associate?

I chose that moment not only because it was a milestone I reached in my career, but in recognition of the huge shift in mindset and new mentality it required. I was faced with more responsibilities in my new role, and more was expected of me. I was leading juniors on my team. I had to step up, be clear with my strategy, and have a confident command of every situation.

It's a tough industry. It has been taxing at times, and I often get caught up in the process of becoming. But looking back, I can see how it has shaped me, and made me stronger and better at what I do.

“Over time, you will come to embrace your quiet fortitude as a strength, not a weakness.”

Would you say that there was a difference between expectations of that moment versus reality?

Before I joined the firm, I had a certain expectation of what a typical lawyer would look like. I've always been introspective, and I remember thinking that I needed to become more outspoken, worrying that I wouldn't be able to argue for my clients, or represent them in the way they expect.

Fast forward to now, that sense of introversion is indispensable to what I do. In litigation there's a lot of thinking and planning involved, and that reflective nature allows me to be sensitive to nuance.

It also shows that there is no one way to be a Clifford Chance lawyer. While I work with like-minded individuals, there's a place for everyone. Ultimately, clients ask for different things and it's always good to be able to crowd-source knowledge and bring together different personalities. We all share that sense of teamwork and camaraderie, and we are stronger for our differences.

You share a lot of words of wisdom in your letter. If you had to distill that into one piece of advice you would give your past self, what would it be?

Embrace a growth mindset. You don't get there straight away, you grow through the role. It's all a matter of perspective, and the key is using mistakes as pivots and learning opportunities. Even as an Associate or beyond, you're always learning, and that's okay.

“It's a marathon, not a sprint – remember your training, embrace it, and most of all, enjoy it.”

Adrian Doerr

Associate, London

Adrian is an Associate in the Antitrust practice in London. He advises clients on all areas of EU and UK competition law, in particular concerning antitrust investigations and regulatory aspects, as well as cross-border merger control and the application of foreign investment regimes.

Hi Adrian,

You are about to leave London for your secondment to the Clifford Chance office in Sydney – the last six months of your training contract and the end of this chapter.

You have already accomplished so much – from being a paralegal in Düsseldorf (Germany) to starting your training contract in London, going on secondment to a client and to Clifford Chance office in Madrid.

You have seen a lot already and yet this is different – you are back in the deep end, a new practice area, a new country.

It won't be easy, knowing what you'll leave behind:

Your friends, family, and even a partner.

You need to prove yourself in this environment, you are joining a busy practice, working on international deals that don't account for your time zone. People tell you to enjoy your time down under when your mind is busy juggling your work, life, and future all at the same time. The uncertainty of what will be when you are back is unsettling.

Where will you qualify? What country should you be in?

Is this the career you want? Is this the lifestyle you want?

Will you have a social life when you qualify?

Will your friendships and relationship last?

Would it have been easier to stay at home?

The fact is, you don't know what would have been nor what will be.

Hi Adrian,

You are about to leave for your secondment to the Clifford Chance office in Sydney – the last six months of your Training Contract, and the end of this chapter.

You have already accomplished so much – from being a Paralegal in Düsseldorf, to starting your Training Contract in London, going on secondment to a client, and to the Clifford Chance office in Madrid.

You have seen a lot, and yet this is different – you are back in the deep end, a new practice area, a new country.

It won't be easy, knowing what you'll leave behind:

Your friends, family, and even a partner.

You need to prove yourself in this new environment; you are joining a busy practice, working on international deals that don't account for your time zone. People tell you to enjoy your time Down Under when your mind is busy juggling your work, life, and future all at the same time. The uncertainty of what will be when you are back is unsettling.

Where will you qualify? What country should you be in? Is this the career you want? Is this the lifestyle you want? Will you have a social life when you qualify? Will your friendships and relationship last? Would it have been easier to stay at home?

The fact is, you don't know what would have been, nor what will be. You have followed your instincts and look how far you have come with it. Questioning yourself and your decisions is normal. You are completing this milestone that you have worked so hard for. Talk to your colleagues, friends, and family – you will see that they all go through similar phases. They are here for you, they understand you, and they are proud of you. They know you can do it, and you know it too! Try to enjoy this process as much as you can, and know that whatever comes your way, you can handle it.

Think back to when you started. You are exactly where you wanted to be – you are working for one of the world's best law firms, travelling the world, and about to qualify in your chosen practice area – you are here because you have shown that you can do it. You have grown with every step in your career and it has been preparing you for this moment and more. You will realise that there are many different ways to become a leader. And just think about all it has given you so far – you have worked on matters that hit the headlines, made experiences you will never forget, and a whole new world has opened to you that some years ago you didn't even know existed.

Trust in yourself, your resilience and strength. Follow your instincts. This is only the beginning and there is so much more that awaits you. You are stepping into an exciting new chapter – you will make the right decisions and you will not be alone.

The world is your oyster. Enjoy, grow and trust yourself. You can do it, and it will be good.

Yours, Adrian

Adrian's Story



Where did your journey with Clifford Chance begin?

I joined as an intern in the Düsseldorf office in 2015, and went on to become a Paralegal in the Antitrust team there until 2019. I took a short break to finalise my PhD, and in 2021 started my Training Contract in the London office. I became an Associate in 2023 and haven't looked back since!

Why did you choose Clifford Chance?

I'm what we call a Clifford Chance 'lifer' because I've been with the firm since the beginning of my legal career. Clifford Chance was one of the first to offer me an opportunity, even when other firms were hesitant to hire me because my background was unusual. I felt like the firm valued this difference and recognised that it gives me a unique perspective, seeing me as a whole person and all that I have to offer. That's why I've stuck with the firm - they hold true to their values and actively support diversity.

In your letter, you speak to your past self at a time when you are about to enter the final six months of your Training Contract. Why?

When I started my Training Contract, I had a very clear plan for where I wanted to do all four seats. But by the time I had completed my third seat, that plan was almost unrecognisable, and I was preparing to fly out to Sydney for my last six months - it was something I hadn't expected, so it was definitely a very uncertain but equally exciting time. I was moving to a new continent, not knowing if I had a job at the end of it, or what I even wanted my future to look like. That's why it was such a formative and challenging time - because I asked myself the big questions. But looking back, that was incredibly important, and the outcome is well worth the journey.

“I was moving to a new continent, not knowing if I had a job at the end of it...”

“You have followed your instincts... and look how far you have come with it.”

What would you tell this version of your past self, knowing what you know now?

I wish I could tell myself to trust my instincts. Throughout my career, there have been moments of self-doubt and frustration. At the same time, I've learned valuable lessons from every stage of my career, and I'm grateful for the insights I gained, which prepared me for where I am now.

How have those learnings informed the rest of your career at Clifford Chance?

As a lawyer, uncertainty is part of the job, and there's times where you need to sacrifice plans to meet demands. The initial years of instability taught me how to handle those challenges and be prepared for it as best as I can. I've learned that progression in your career doesn't make life easier, just different. For example, after I qualified, I transitioned from Trainee to Associate overnight and found myself giving advice to others when just weeks before I had been seeking it myself. While it can be daunting, it's what you've trained for. You rise to the challenge - and that's what drives me.

“Trust in yourself, your resilience and strength.”

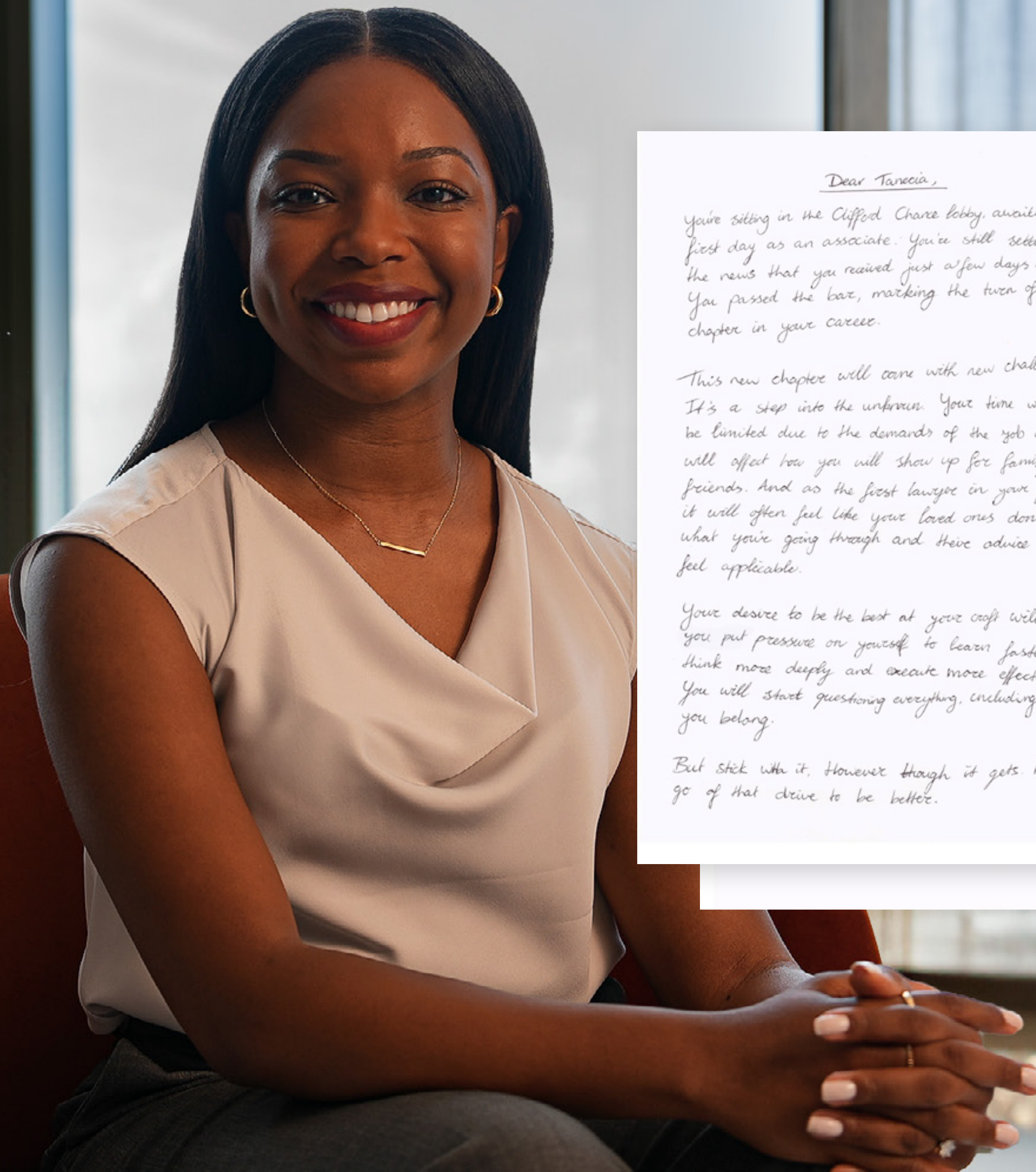
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Tanecia Vasquez

Associate, New York

Tanecia is a first-year Associate in New York. She has advised domestic and international companies on a wide range of transactional matters.



Dear Tanecia,

You're sitting in the Clifford Chance lobby, awaiting your first day as an associate. You're still settling into the news that you received just a few days ago. You passed the bar, marking the turn of a new chapter in your career.

This new chapter will come with new challenges. It's a step into the unknown. Your time will often be limited due to the demands of the job and it will affect how you will show up for family and friends. And as the first lawyer in your family it will often feel like your loved ones don't understand what you're going through and their advice won't always feel applicable.

Your desire to be the best at your craft will mean you put pressure on yourself to learn faster, think more deeply and execute more effectively. You will start questioning everything, including whether you belong.

But stick with it, however tough it gets. Never let go of that drive to be better.

Dear Tanecia,

You're sitting in the Clifford Chance lobby, awaiting your first day as an Associate. You're still settling into the news that you received just a few days ago – you passed the bar, marking the turn of a new chapter in your career.

This new chapter will come with new challenges. It's a step into the unknown. Your time will often be limited due to the demands of the job and it will affect how you show up for family and friends. And as the first lawyer in your family, it will often feel like your loved ones don't understand what you're going through, and their advice won't always feel applicable. And your desire to be the best at your craft will mean you put pressure on yourself to learn faster, think more deeply, and execute more effectively. You will start questioning everything, including whether you belong.

But stick with it.

However tough it gets, never let go of that drive to be better. Though there will be mistakes along the way, your growth will be a testament of your hard work. And while your family and friends may never understand all of the unique challenges that come with working in such a demanding and rigorous environment, they know that this is what you want, and they will always keep pushing you forward.

In time, you will achieve amazing things here, inspiring others who thought a career like this was out of reach.

So when another non-traditional law student comes around, and their path has been anything but narrow, you can tell them that it is all possible. Use your voice. You'll be the kind of person you wished to see when you embarked on this journey.

While you navigate this journey, be kind to yourself, and no matter what, just keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Love, Tanecia

Tanecia's Story



Why did you choose your first day as an Associate after passing the bar as the pivotal moment you addressed your letter to?

I always wanted to be a lawyer, ever since I was a little kid watching lawyers on TV, but it didn't always feel attainable. After being a public school teacher for a few years, I finally decided to pursue my dream.

Passing the bar marked the realisation of that childhood dream. It was a turn of a new chapter. I had officially joined the legal profession and felt a heightened sense of ownership towards my work. Upholding the high standards I set for myself and representing the firm with excellence was paramount to me. Although this milestone came with some pressure, it also brought opportunity as well.

What was going through your head on that day in the Clifford Chance lobby?

I knew it would be hard work, but I wasn't nervous about that. My parents immigrated to this country, and they ingrained a mindset into me that you have to work hard to create the reality you desire, so I was prepared for that. Instead, I was very eager to finally live this dream of mine and find out whether this new career would be as rewarding as I'd hoped.

During the process of applying to law firms, I'd spent a lot of time speaking to Attorneys from Clifford Chance about their experience at the firm. I was very strategic about where I wanted to go, because I knew the job would be demanding and I recognised the importance of support, training, and mentorship. In the end I chose Clifford Chance because of how positively everybody spoke of the people that worked there, and how it helped them grow both personally and professionally. The genuine and candid responses of those Attorneys provided me with a clear understanding of what to expect. Their authentic yet encouraging words were at the forefront of my mind that day.

“However tough it gets, never let go of that drive to be better.”

Your letter doesn't shy away from the challenges of being a lawyer. How have you learned to manage the pressure throughout your career?

I am fortunate to have found an amazing support system, with experienced lawyers who help sharpen my skills and peers who validate my experiences. It is crucial to listen and learn from those around you so that you can find out what works for you.

Outside of the office, I'm still learning how to unwind effectively. My mind is constantly occupied with thoughts of how I can improve, what I can read next, and ways to enhance my abilities. This makes it challenging for me to intentionally take a break, even when there is an opportunity to do so. Thankfully, I have my husband, family, and friends reminding me to cherish the journey and to celebrate all the small wins and progress made along the way.

Despite all the challenges, is there any one moment that has allowed you to reflect on your success?

The moment I received my first evaluation. In your first year, it's common to focus on everything you want to learn, rather than the skills you already have or how much you have already learned. But when I got my evaluation, it showed that people across deal teams noticed and appreciated my ability to learn quickly, my strong work ethic, and my eagerness to learn more. This further motivated me to keep striving for growth for the benefit of our teams and clients.

“You'll be the kind of person you wished to see when you embarked on this journey.”

What piece of advice would you give to other Associates about to start their first day at Clifford Chance?

I would advise that even though there is much to learn, your dedication to both the work and the team will drive your success. By consistently asking questions, following through, and proactively finding ways to advance the deal, you will leave a positive mark and become a valuable asset to the team and clients.

It can be daunting to join a large global firm such as Clifford Chance, where you might expect a certain type of environment. For those who are hesitant about the profession, I encourage you to give it a try. Despite the challenges, the experience is incredibly rewarding, and you'll find support from those around you every step of the way.

Maja Zerjal Fink

Partner, New York

Maja is a Partner in New York. Her practice focuses on all aspects of corporate reorganisations, distressed situations and bankruptcy and insolvency proceedings in the United States and across the globe.

Hi Maja,

You're about to sign a contract with Clifford Chance, leaving the firm where you've been a Partner for years.

But what makes this step truly significant is not the new office or the prestige of the firm. It's the promise you make to yourself right now: a commitment to grow, embrace new challenges, and harness your unique skills in a global context.

It won't be easy, knowing what you'll leave behind:

The comfort of a known environment, and colleagues and friends who you've grown to lean on and trust.

It might feel like a leap of faith.

One that could go wrong in ways you now cannot fully predict.

Everything will feel new and untested.

And at times, even with years of experience behind you, you'll feel like you're out of your depth.

You'll be challenged in ways you've never been before.

Not just because of the example set by your new colleagues.

Hi Maja,

You're about to sign a contract with Clifford Chance, leaving the firm where you've been a Partner for years.

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It might feel like a leap of faith.
One that could go wrong in ways you now cannot fully predict.
Everything will feel new and untested.
And at times, even with years of experience behind you, you'll feel like you're out of your depth.

You'll be challenged in ways you've never been before.
Not just because of the example set by your new colleagues,
But because of the sheer weight of responsibility that will suddenly be thrust upon your shoulders.

There will be many things that don't go your way,
And in these moments, you will question everything.
Whether you've taken on too much.
Whether you'll be able to rise to the challenge ahead of you.

But trust in yourself, like you've always done.

Because it is precisely in these moments, when you are truly tested, that you will achieve amazing things and realise what you are capable of.

Remember when you first came to the United States from Slovenia, filled with dreams yet plagued by imposter syndrome? Back then, you felt like a fraud, unsure if you truly belonged in the world of corporate law at the highest level.

But look at how far you've come.

Believe that people will start to see what you are building at the firm.
Leading pioneering cross-border projects in your field.
Helping grow the firm in the US.

You'll see your team succeed, and their success will feel even more important to you than your own.

It's not going to happen overnight.
And there will be many tough days ahead of you.

But know - you have come this far because you embrace challenges.
So, don't give up.
And take that leap of faith.

Best, Maja

Maja's Story



Your letter begins with the moment you signed your contract with Clifford Chance, leaving the firm where you had been a Partner for a number of years. What was that like?

I was very happy where I was, but they say that that's the best time to consider a new opportunity, and I couldn't turn this one down. While it certainly wasn't easy to leave my comfort zone, I saw this as my chance to challenge myself to be more than a lawyer, and contribute to building the firm's presence in a key market.

“While it wasn't easy to leave my comfort zone, I saw this as my chance to challenge myself.”

Why did you choose Clifford Chance to be the place you took that leap of faith?

Clifford Chance offered a unique opportunity to help expand the firm's business in the US market while benefiting from the support of a prestigious global network.

When we talk about Clifford Chance as a global firm, we're not just talking about the geographic footprint. I feel strongly that everyone across our many offices is working together towards one common goal, and that builds great trust. This level of integration and teamwork is rare. At Clifford Chance, I can reach out to colleagues anywhere in the world and find not only exceptional expertise but also genuine enthusiasm and eagerness to collaborate. And that really makes a difference.

“It might feel like a leap of faith. One that could go wrong in ways you now cannot fully predict.”

Maja Zerjal Fink

What is the most important thing you've learnt from this experience so far?

It has reinforced the notion that having an incredible team allows everyone to prioritise what they do best. I have been lucky to have excellent support in every step of the way. No transition is easy, but the seamless support and organisation has made it much easier.

I've been consistently impressed by everyone's responsiveness, collaboration, and willingness to jump in whenever needed, and it's truly made me feel part of a team from the very first day.

If you could go back to that moment and give your past self a piece of advice, what would you say?

Work hard, stay focused and stay organised. Pay close attention to the organisational culture of the firm, and learn how to collaborate effectively with your new colleagues. Adapting to the size of the firm and navigating its systems and processes may be challenging, but remember, it's all part of the journey. Be patient with yourself, and trust that you will grasp it and thrive in time.

“Believe that people will start to see what you are building at the firm, leading pioneering cross-border projects in your field.”

Ryan Wong

Counsel, Hong Kong

Ryan Wong is a Counsel specialising in cross-border public and private mergers and acquisitions, takeovers, joint ventures, pre-IPO investments, and equity capital market transactions.

Dear Ryan,
You're standing at the entrance of the High Court in Hong Kong - minutes away from being admitted by a judge and qualified as a lawyer, after two years of training contract in Hong Kong and London.

Your family and friends are there sharing one of the proudest moments of your life... But this is also the beginning of an uphill journey unlike anything you've experienced before.

As a qualified lawyer, people will expect things from you that you think is out of your reach.

Whole teams will rely on you - CEO's will call you directly with questions - And sometimes your girlfriend and family will find it hard to understand why you have to cancel on them.

But stick with it... Because you are not alone!

Ryan

Dear Ryan,

You're standing at the entrance of the High Court in Hong Kong - minutes away from being admitted by a judge and qualified as a lawyer, after two years of a Training Contract in Hong Kong and London.

Your family and friends are there sharing one of the proudest moments of your life, but this is also the beginning of an uphill journey unlike anything you've experienced before.

As a qualified lawyer, people will expect things from you that you think is out of your reach.

Whole teams will rely on you - CEOs will call you directly with questions, and sometimes your girlfriend and family will find it hard to understand why you have to cancel on them.

But - stick with it, because you are not alone.

You'll realise that everyone around you in the firm goes through the same challenges. And that you're one text, one call away from a whole group of people who will come to your aid.

In those 12 months, you will learn that you are more capable, more resilient than you ever imagined. Before long, you will be helping lead large multinational deals, and have a group of colleagues who look up to you for guidance.

Years later, you will look back on your experience with a smile, because of everything you have learnt, and every challenge you have faced.

You will realise that the challenges, the thrills – they are everything you wanted when you signed the contract, and more.

So before you walk up those steps, tell yourself - you can do it.
And be ready for an extraordinary journey.

Yours, Ryan

Ryan's Story



What brought you to Clifford Chance?

I chose Clifford Chance because of the opportunity for international experience, both during my Training Contract and beyond. I grew up in Hong Kong and completed my education in the UK, so it was difficult to decide where to do my Training Contract as both places felt like home. As a global firm, Clifford Chance enabled me to split my Training Contract between London and Hong Kong, and after qualifying, I was able to move between the offices, so it felt like a perfect fit.

Your letter begins with a pivotal moment - the day you qualified. Of all the big events in your career, why did you choose that one?

In Hong Kong, we go to the High Court to be qualified by a judge. We wear gowns and get a lecture from the judge about protecting the rule of law. It's quite a striking moment because, from that moment onwards, you are responsible for what you do. There's no safety net anymore.

The 12 months following my qualification were incredibly tough. It was a steep learning curve full of new responsibilities. I remember needing to work on the weekend in a team of four, and we each took long shifts in the office. My shift was last, and we all thought the work was nearly finished - until I got a call from the CEO of the client company with some urgent work to do.

Immediately after that phone call, the senior Partners on my team reached out to offer their support. They were so encouraging and even offered to come back into the office if needed. That's the thing about Clifford Chance - despite its size, you know that you are not alone. It's a vast firm, so you won't struggle to find people who are in the same shoes as you, or who have been before.

“In those 12 months, you will learn that you are more capable, more resilient than you ever imagined.”

Ryan Wong

You're clearly no stranger to the challenges that this vocation brings. Were there any moments that made it all worth it?

Too many to count! An experience that stands out from early in my career was when I worked on a particular transaction that had been my sole focus for 12 months. At the end of the year I presented at the Board meeting of a major listed company to close the deal. When I had finished, the Chairman of the Board turned to me and said, "thank you, Ryan, we are grateful for all the hard work." It also happened to be my birthday that day, which made the moment even more meaningful. It was really quite a moving experience.

With all you know now, if you could go back and say one thing to yourself as you stood on those High Court steps, what would you say?

That it's all worth it. Don't be apprehensive, throw yourself into it. You *should* be working as hard as you can, because the harder you work, the greater the satisfaction when it's done. And also that it's okay to ask for help. Like I said before, you will never be alone.

“So before you walk up those steps, tell yourself - you can do it. And be ready for an extraordinary journey.”

Bahar Rahimyar

Counsel, Düsseldorf

Bahar is a Counsel based in Düsseldorf. She advises on structured finance transactions, with a particular view on project finance, ECA covered financings, (renewable) energy and real assets.

Dear Bahar,

What you hold in your hands today, is not only your Training Contract, it is also your entry ticket into a whole new world which is completely unknown to you.

But the Real Contract isn't the one you're holding in your hands. It's the contract you enter into with yourself. Right now.

What lies behind you are many years of study and discipline. The struggle to constantly prove that people around you have been underestimating you.

But from now on, that is the past. And things are different.

Not just because of the late nights and hard work, but because of the responsibility that will suddenly be upon your shoulders. Instead of being underestimated, you will feel as if your colleagues and superiors have expectations, you could not possibly fulfil and you'll experience all these things again in 7 years, when you return as a new mother.

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Despite all of your studies and legal knowledge, you will sometimes doubt whether you have learned anything in law school that you can use in practice.

It is the high standard that leads to many learning curves and races against the time in order to meet deadlines. But giving up is not an option – it never has been.

It is exactly those times that will teach you about your own strength, determination and resilience. And in moments when your self-belief does not suffice, you will have that one Partner, client, or colleague who will say just the right words to

keep you going. Because in those moments of self-doubt, they see the lawyer you can become.

In this challenge, you are not alone. Know that you are surrounded by knowledgeable and inspiring people, and have the privilege to call them your colleagues. Your team. You can ask them any question.

Look at how far you've come: working on gigantic deals which will make a difference in people's lives. Your projects will deliver electricity into areas where this is not a given. They will contribute to a cleaner world, they will secure health care in newly built hospitals - and you will get to travel and see many of those projects with your own eyes. Knowing that you contributed to this will reward you for all the sacrifices you made.

You originally started in law because you wanted to make a change. And whilst you had other changes in mind, the ones you will get to contribute to are no less important.

You will develop into a specialist in your field, you will make an impact for the environment, and you will pay forward all the belief and support that you have benefited from to younger colleagues. It is a challenging road, and you will never feel completely in your comfort zone – but that's exactly why you're here. Because just like quitting never was an option, neither is standing still.

Love, Bahar

Bahar's Story



You addressed your letter to the moment you started your Training Contract. Why?

When I think back to that time in my life, it's something of a miracle that I even applied in the first place. I have an Afghan refugee background, and I come from a very different background compared to my idea of a typical, traditional lawyer. It was my oldest brother who convinced me to apply. He queried, 'What do you have to lose? What's the worst that can happen?' So when I applied, I did not think for a second that I would get it.

“The parts of myself I had been so worried about were actually a strength.”

When I was invited to the interview, I was very nervous. I felt as if everyone around me somehow knew something I didn't. But when I went in, despite my insecurities, we spoke about my background very openly and the Partner interviewing me said that it actually made me unique and gave me a very broad perspective on things. The parts of myself I had been so worried about were actually a strength. It was eye opening. So that moment was the first big game changer in my career.

How have you learnt to deal with those insecurities throughout your career?

From time to time, I do still have these insecurities and self-doubts. I look around and wonder how I can possibly compete with these bright minds around me and how I eventually ended up here. But over time I have realised that everyone is facing similar challenges and figuring things out in their own way. Not everyone talks about it.

Something that has really helped my mindset is volunteering with REACH, our Diversity and Inclusion network. I am very passionate about it. I originally chose the legal profession because I wanted to change the world, and I'm really grateful for the chance to do this in my microcosmos and help make law more accessible to those from different backgrounds. I participate in many recruitment initiatives, and I value listening to what people have to say about the barriers that might stop them from applying, because I have been in their shoes, and I know exactly how they feel.

“You originally started in law because you wanted to make a change.”

Your letter mentions that you are surrounded by inspiring people. Is there anyone in particular who has had a formative influence on you?

The Partner I work with is a huge inspiration to me. He always says that if something isn't working, change it. Even in a large global firm like Clifford Chance, things aren't set in stone - it's just people working together. There is always someone you can approach for help - you don't have to do anything on your own.

It's clear that you've worked incredibly hard to get to where you are today. Can you tell us about a moment that made it all worth it?

There's a lot of moments I could choose from, but the one that comes to mind is the first time I covered a transaction from start to finish. That was the first time I was able to see a transaction from all angles, and it was also the first time I negotiated all the contracts on my own.

I remember hanging up the phone and thinking, 'Wow, I did that all by myself'. That's not to say that there weren't other people on the team, but it was the first time I realised that people were relying on me. Nobody was double-checking my work - they trusted me. That was really powerful for me.

When you're a junior, it's easy to look at a senior and think that they are unreachable. You put people on a pedestal and think that you could never achieve that level of knowledge and success. I still feel that way sometimes, but then also I realise how far I've come - for example, when I am explaining some legal issue to a junior lawyer, and I remember my own early nerves and fear of making a mistake. It's rewarding to see myself becoming the kind of person I used to admire.

“You will never feel completely in your comfort zone – but that’s exactly why you’re here.”

Working for Clifford Chance is one of the most challenging things a lawyer can do, at any stage of their career.

That's why they join.

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C H A N C E

The Real Contract